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FOR OES/IHA-D.SINGER AND R.DALEY AND WHA/CAR-D.SEARBY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [DR](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: AVIAN AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC INFORMATION

REF: STATE 209622

1. Embassy's answers to country-specific questions about avian and pandemic influenza (AI) follow and are keyed to the subheads and ticks in para 4 reftel:

A. Preparedness/communication:

-- The country does not yet have a plan or strategy for preventing avian influenza from becoming a pandemic or for containing a pandemic once it occurs. At a press conference on October 25 the Dominican government declared its commitment to address AI issues, and it is reactivating a working group for emerging and re-emerging diseases which met November 2. This group will be led by Secretary of State for Public Health Dr. Bautista Rojas Gomez and chaired by him or by Under Secretary for Collective Health Dr. Rafael Schiffino. It will include all important stakeholders, including government entities, donors, NGOs, and the private sector. Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and USAID are the lead donor agencies for now. The Secretariat of Health's epidemiology department will take the lead to prepare a draft plan, with technical assistance from PAHO, which will then be shared widely. The government has announced that it will base its country response on international guidelines.

-- The Dominican Government has stated that it will provide accurate information within its capabilities. Authorities distributed an information packet at the October 25 press conference. The Dominican Republic's free and aggressive press is likely to seek updated information.

-- Senior public health policymakers are aware of the AI situation and state that they are committed to working with Dominican society and donors on this issue. The "go to" persons for U.S. Government officials to engage include:

Secretary of State for Public Health Dr. Bautista Rojas

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Gomez,
Under Secretary for Collective Health Dr. Rafael Schiffino,
and
Dr. Elizabeth Gomez, director of the National Epidemiology Directorate and chairperson of the AI technical working group.

-- National laws have not been specifically reviewed with regard to consistency with international health regulations. Embassy considers that the laws would probably not pose any barrier to AI detection, reporting, containment, or response.

-- USAID and PAHO have already offered technical assistance to the authorities. The United States can approach the government bilaterally and in multilateral fora.

-- The Dominican Republic does not have a capability to administer annual flu shots, unless it were to receive assistance or shift budget priorities. The country does not produce flu vaccine.

-- As previously noted, the government has held a press conference on AI, and news articles have appeared in several nationally distributed dailies. To achieve broad coverage of the population, local television and radio stations would need to devote more attention to the issue.

B. Surveillance/detection:

-- With technical assistance, Dominican medical and agricultural sectors are capable of clinically detecting new flu strains and diagnosing cases. Embassy doubts that influenza viruses could be subtyped in country; the authorities would normally send such viruses to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for analysis.

-- The greatest gap in the country's disease detection and outbreak response capability is financing for supplies, equipment, and public education campaigns. As of now, there is no budget assigned specifically to AI-related activities, and no donor has offered monetary or in-kind assistance.

1C. Response/containment:

-- So far no medications have been stockpiled, nor have any been ordered. The issue of stockpiling will be considered in the national response plan to be developed by the working group. The National Medicine Support Center (PROMESECAL) should play a key role on this matter.

-- There is no pre-positioned personal protective gear. This issue will be addressed in the national plan.

-- The authorities are evaluating the rapid response capacity for human and animal outbreaks, but guidelines are not yet in place.

-- Embassy believes that the government would be willing to impose quarantines or social distancing measures if necessary and would use the police or military, as appropriate. However, we cannot predict the effectiveness of such measures outside the major cities.

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